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ORIENTAL LABOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

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No student of the Asiatic problem in America can afford to ignore the effects of imported colored labor in South Africa. South of the Zambesi an "experimental plot" has been conducted for many years, and from its records other lands can see what the competition of the races of the East really means, and what influence that competition is likely to have upon a white population. But in glancing at the dismal picture presented by South Africa to-day, it must be remembered that the Asiatic competition to which the people of European descent are subjected, is by no means the worst of its kind. The Indian immigrants in these colonies are usually drawn from the dregs of the millions of India. In energy, ability and the capacity for succeeding they are far behind the Chinese in the Straits Settlements, or the Japanese of British Columbia.

Although in South Africa the native black population now out-numbers the whites by six to one, this was not always the case. In the earliest days of European settlement in the Cape Colony, the newcomers found an almost empty land. The Kaffir invasion from the northeast had not reached within hundreds of miles of Table Bay. The only people found in the vicinity of the settlement were a few wretched tribesmen who wandered over a large area of country. If, soon after Van Riebeek began his garden in 1652, a policy of introducing white labor had been adopted and systematically followed up, South Africa to-day would be a far different country. Only the system of relying upon colored labor has kept it back. The first slaves brought to the little settlement were shipped from Asia. Then the Dutch colonists sent to the West Coast of Africa for blacks, and several hundred had been introduced before the close of the seventeenth century. The system led with great rapidity to the springing up of a half-breed race, and Isbrand Gostic, who visited the Cape in 1671, considered the circumstances so scandalous and demoralizing to the whites that he attempted to legislate against them. In these early days, however, there was no likelihood of the

system being altered for sentimental reasons. It was too widely accepted as the most reasonable policy of development.

In 1716 the Council of Policy at Table Bay came to a decision which must always be regretted by the lover of South Africa. The directors of the Dutch East India Company in Holland submitted a number of important points to the Council at the Cape, and among them was the question whether it would not be more advantageous to employ European laborers than slaves. "It must ever be deplored," says Theal, the historian of the Cape, "that of the men who sat in the Council in February, 1717, there was but one who could look beyond the gains of the present hour." Only the commander of the garrison, Captain Dominique Pasques de Chavonnes, a brother of the governor, advocated the introduction of European workmen instead of slaves. But this view was voted down. The basis of South Africa was made colored labor, and it has been the basis of the country to this day, with the result that in this huge tract of land stretching from Table Bay to the Zambesi there are but a little over a million white people—the population, say, of Nebraska. Only one or two enlightened men saw the danger. One of them was the governor-general, Van Imhoff, who, in a memorandum he drew up in February, 1743, regretted that Europeans in large numbers were not sent out in the early days of the settlement. The introduction of slaves, he said, had caused every white man, no matter how humble his birth, to regard himself as a master, and unless paid at an extravagant rate he expected to be served instead of to serve others.

In South Africa the importation of Asiatic slaves went on until 1767. Then the government at the Cape became apprehensive of the too great preponderance of this class of the population—"for when excited they were prone to commit appalling crimes," and the Council of India were earnestly asked not to continue to export Asiatic slaves to South Africa.

In the next century came British dominance at the Cape, and the liberation of the slaves. But the habit of relying upon colored labor had become ingrained, and, as the natives of the country were unreliable workers, it was resolved to import Asiatics.

The beginning of the Oriental labor system in South Africa on any considerable scale dates back to 1859, when the land owners of Natal asked Sir George Grey to be allowed to import labor. The

Corporation of Durban supported the appeal in an address which included the following:

Independently of measures for developing the labor of our own natives, we believe your Excellency will find occasion to sanction the introduction of a *limited number of coolie or other laborers* from the East in aid of the new enterprises *on the coast lands*, to the success of which sufficient and reliable labor is absolutely essential; for the fact cannot be too strongly borne in mind that on the success or failure of these rising enterprises *depends the advancement of the colony or its certain and rapid decline*. Experimental cultivation has abundantly demonstrated that the issue depends solely on a constant supply of labor.

The manner in which this comparatively modest request has expanded in the course of half a century is a remarkable indication of the danger of admitting Asiatic labor. The "limited number of coolie or other laborers from the East" has swelled into an Indian population *greater than the entire white population of Natal*. The Asiatics called in to help industries on "the coast lands" have spread all over the uplands which ought to support a large white population. Instead of the tea and sugar planter alone demanding Asiatic labor, it is the farmers, the manufacturers, the wealthier residents of town and country alike. To-day the adult male Indians in Natal outnumber the adult male Europeans by ten thousand. Indian shops are found in the best streets of Durban, and in some of the small towns hardly a white man's store is left. The "limited number" of coolies now own thousands of acres of land. They are the fruit and vegetable growers of the colony. The Kaffir "truck" trade, which at one time supported many white families, has drifted almost entirely into their hands. A member of the Natal Legislature wrote some time ago:

Indians both rent land and hold it freehold, and their holdings of both classes are extending year by year. Large areas in the coast country of Victoria, north of Durban, have of late years been acquired by syndicates of Europeans and retailed acre by acre to these people, who are keen to buy, and are willing to pay prices which no European could afford for occupation and cultivation. As a matter of fact, in this Garden County of the Garden Colony, the European population cultivating or in intimate connection with the soil is probably smaller in number than it was thirty years ago, while the Indian is gradually taking up the land upon which was (*sic*) reared in those days families of Europeans—colonists of the best stamp. What will be the outcome is causing anxious thought to many in Natal, who look beyond the present day and its present profit.

In "The Asiatic Danger in the Colonies"¹ I gave some figures, taken from the Natal Census Report of 1904, showing the extent to which Oriental competition has gained a grip on the colony. As no later figures are available at present, I may be allowed to reprint two of the tables. The first deals with storekeeping:

	Europeans.	Asiatics.
Storekeepers (general)	658	1,260
Storekeepers' assistants	1,252	1,323
Bakers and confectioners	213	78
Butchers and assistants	306	42
Grocers and assistants	425	75
Restaurant keepers	64	26

The second table is a more general one:

	Europeans.	Asiatics.
Bricklayers and assistants	1,056	122
Blacksmiths and assistants	523	30
Barmen	251	37
Brick and tilemakers	98	23
Boot and shoemakers	108	66
Barbers and assistants	118	131
Brewers and assistants	68	27
Bookbinders and assistants	47	13
Billiard markers	33	11
Carpenters and assistants	2,328	196
Cooks	147	457
Coachmen and grooms	92	117
Cycle dealers and mechanics	37	12
Carriers and carters	137	262
Cigar and cigarette makers	11	104
Domestic servants	1,083	2,132
Engine drivers (locomotive and stationary)...	516	57
Fishermen	100	108
Firemen and stokers	652	257
Hawkers	19	1,487
Jewelers and assistants	105	381
Laborers (general)	353	13,799
Laborers (railway	164	610
Municipal employees	141	543
Messengers	3	99
Miners	208	185
Mineral water manufacturers and assistants ..	69	21

¹Published by Routledge & Sons in 1907.

	Europeans.	Asiatics.
Mine laborers	600
Painters	661	79
Printers and compositors	448	61
Plumbers and tinsmiths	356	81
Photographers and assistants	99	12
Porters (hotel and general)	96	133
Pumpmen (Natal railways	1	32
Pointsmen (Natal railways)	138
Quarrymen	16	56
Tailors and assistants	266	126
Tobacconists and assistants	47	22
Waiters	100	658

One more example of the effect of Asiatic competition may be quoted, because it shows how, even in times of great depression, the Oriental can thrive while the white man goes under. The Cape Colony, like the rest of South Africa, has in recent years gone through extremely bad times. White storekeepers went under in large numbers. But the Orientals held their ground. For instance, in the five largest towns in the Cape Colony—Capetown, East London, King William's Town, Kimberley, and Port Elizabeth—the number of general dealers' licenses issued to Europeans in 1905 was 5,222. But on May 1, 1906, only 3,920 Europeans had taken out licenses. That is to say, 1,302 Europeans had been forced out of business. Now in 1905 there were 1,012 general dealers' licenses issued to non-Europeans. But on May 6, 1906, there had been no decrease. On the contrary, the licenses numbered 1,059. In these five towns, therefore, in one year the increased competition had had the following effect:

1. Licenses to Europeans *decreased* 1,302.
2. Licenses to non-Europeans *increased* 44.

In the face of these statistics, all taken from official publications, it is hardly necessary to dwell further upon the effect of an infiltration of Asiatics into a land in which there is already a large white population. The figures tell their own tale.

The condition of South Africa—especially of Natal—is a warning to other lands to bar Asiatic immigrants. I have no prejudice against the Eastern races. During several years' residence in India I had many opportunities of seeing the excellent qualities of an Asiatic people—personally I prefer India to any country I have

seen. But I cannot shut my eyes to the disastrous effects of allowing any considerable Asiatic population to settle in a land in which there is already a large white population. The Asiatics will never be absorbed. Always they will live apart, a source of weakness to the community. America has absorbed hundreds of thousands of foreigners from Europe. They have intermarried with the older population. Hardly a trace of them will remain in a few generations. But a hundred thousand Asiatics in Natal have not been absorbed and never will be absorbed; and in America the same isolation would be found for generation after generation.

Both economically and socially the presence of a large Oriental population is bad. The Asiatics either force out the white workers, or compel the latter to live down to the Asiatic level. There must be a marked deterioration amongst the white working classes, which renders useless a great deal of the effort made in educational work. The white population is educated and trained according to the best ideas of the highest form of Western civilization—and has to compete for a livelihood against Asiatics. In South Africa this competition is driving out the white working class, because the average European cannot live down to the Asiatic level—and if it is essential that the European must do so, then for the sake of his own happiness do not educate him up to better things. If cheapness is the only consideration, if low wages are to come before everything else, then it is not only waste of money, but absolute cruelty, to inspire in the white working classes tastes and aspirations which it is impossible for them to realize. To meet Asiatic competition squarely it would be necessary to train the white children to be Asiatics. Even the pro-Orientals would hardly advocate this.

Further, Asiatic labor in South Africa is now seen to be a weakness to the state. It drives out white people in a land in which white men are needed for the safety of the community against the Kaffir hordes. It increases the problems of the country by establishing a large colored population which is not native and resents being brought under laws for natives, and yet cannot be placed on an equality with the white population. Besides, the Asiatic is worth less to the country than the white man he displaces. It is estimated in Natal that the Oriental only contributes £1 6 4½ a year to the public revenue, whereas the white resident returns £30 11 4. The Oriental buys as little as possible and sends all he

can to his relatives in Asia. If he marries and settles down, his children only increase the difficulty of the color problem.

The experience of South Africa is that when once Asiatic labor is admitted, the tendency is for it to grow. One manufacturer secures it and is able to cut prices to such an extent that the other manufacturers are forced either to employ Asiatics also or to reduce white wages to the Asiatic level. Oriental labor is something which does not stand still. The taste for it grows. A party springs up financially interested in increasing it. In Natal to-day the suggestion that Indian labor should no longer be imported is met by an outcry from the planters, the farmers and landowners, and a certain number of manufacturers, that industries and agriculture will be ruined. So the coolie ships continue to arrive at Durban, and Natal becomes more and more a land of black and brown people and less a land of white people. Instead of becoming a Canada or New Zealand, it is becoming a Trinidad or Cuba. Instead of white settlers there are brown settlers. The landowner does not mind, because as Mr. Clayton, an ex-cabinet minister in Natal, said a few years ago, he was pretty confident that his children, rather than have to work any land he might be able to leave them, would prefer to let it to Indians at reasonable rents. The planters and the manufacturers do not mind, because the more Asiatic labor they can get the smaller will be their wages bills and the larger their profits. But the working class white population has to go, as it is going in Natal. The country becomes a country of white landlords and supervisors controlling a horde of Asiatics. It does not produce a nation or a free people. It becomes what in the old days of English colonization was called a "plantation."

The objection to Oriental labor in a white community is not based upon color prejudice. It is an instinct—the instinct of self-preservation. Instinctively the white community realize that with Asiatic immigration their highest ideals cannot survive. The late Sir Henry Parkes put the case eloquently in Australia years ago, when the white man's country ideal was fought for and won there. "It is our duty," he said, "to preserve the type of the British nation, and we ought not for any consideration whatever to admit any element that would detract from, or in any appreciable degree lower, that admirable type of nationality. We should not encourage or admit amongst us any class of persons whatever whom we are not prepared

to advance to all our franchises, to all our privileges as citizens, and all our social rights, including the right of marriage. I maintain that no class of persons should be admitted here, so far as we can reasonably exclude them, who cannot come amongst us, take up all our rights, perform on a ground of equality all our duties, and share in our august and lofty work of founding a free nation."

South Africa sees now that this policy cannot be carried out if Asiatic immigration is allowed. The colonies here are on the point of forming the Union of South Africa under a strong central government. I have no hesitation in predicting that one of the first steps the Union Parliament will take will be to stop the importation of Oriental labor into Natal—even though that labor is from another part of the British Empire. The white people of South Africa will demand this measure. And they will do so because they realize now that the influx of an Oriental people into a white community inevitably results in the ruin of a large number of white families, and in the springing up of difficulties which it were wiser to avoid.